



## A Brief History

From *Ports of the Bristol Channel, Progress & Commerce*, London Printing & Engraving Co., 1893:

**The Bear Brewery** (Messrs. J. Davis and W. Howland, Proprietors), Wells Road, Bath. This famous old brewery, which is undoubtedly one of the most noteworthy in the West of England, is an extension of an ancient hostelry, the Bear Inn, founded over a hundred years ago by the ancestors of Mr. John Davis, one of the present proprietors. The inn was formerly well and favourably known among the country people round about, and being situated on the Wells Road, it was a favourite stopping-place for farmers and others coming in to Bath. The popularity of the house was great, and the first local dog-show was held here, while during the show week of the Bath and West of England Society there have been as many as two hundred horses at one time in the extensive stables and yards. The old inn was also the rendezvous of many clubs, and there may yet be seen the large boilers or coppers which played such an important part in preparing the substantial repasts served here to large parties of hungry guests in the "good old days" of fifty or sixty years ago, before appetites went out of fashion.

The Bear Inn still exists, but the large space once devoted to yards and stabling is now occupied by the brewery, a handsome and imposing structure built by Mr. W. E. Davis, and extended in 1872 by his son, Mr. J. Davis. We ought to say that the old club-rooms of the inn are still existent, though they are now used as hop stores. The fine old skittle-alley also may yet be seen, fitted with all the conveniences beloved of our forefathers, and it is considered to be the best alley in Bath. ... The establishment is a prominent feature of the Wells Road, standing within a stone's throw of the site of the old turnpike gate, and in the main elevation of the lofty brewery building there is a large clock, placed in position by Mr. Davis's father, and greatly appreciated in the neighbourhood as a reliable recorder of the "time o'day."

From *The Rise and Fall of Bath's Breweries 1736-1960* by Mike Bone in *Bath History* Volume VIII, Millstream Books 2000:

"... Other casualties of the early twentieth century were the Bear and Southstoke Breweries. Davis's Bear Brewery - an extension of the ancient Bear Inn on the Wells road - is first noted in directories in 1852 but advertisements claim an earlier history. By 1888 this had an 8bhp steam engine in 'recently erected' premises. It produced a range of old and mild beer, bitter ales and stout and supplied the Bear Inn and a pub in Walcot, as well as harvest and haying beers to local farmers. It closed as an 8Q plant in 1902 when the lease expired. The last operator William Howland had fallen foul of the Inland Revenue some five years earlier, when a late-night visit established the illicit addition of sugar candy to the wort and beer."

## Notes

- 1 The Wells Road was a turnpike road built about 1770 which allowed travellers to avoid the steep ascent/descent of Holloway. The upper turnpike gate was just around the corner. A press report of 23 Jun 1785 refers to the death of "Mr Joseph Flower, on Sat. The Innkeeper of Bear Inn nr Holloway turnpike for many years".

For much of the 19th century, the address for the Bear Inn and Brewery is given as 'Holloway' and only from 1884 is it given as 'Wells road' and from 1908 '8 Wellsway'.



The Bear Brewery – Image courtesy of *Bath in Time* - Bath Central Library

44 POST OFFICE BATH

Telephone, No. 67.

**Bear Brewery,**  
BATH.

CELEBRATED PURE ALES,  
SPECIAL STOUT  
AND  
INVALID PORTER.

WHOLESALE WINE AND SPIRIT MERCHANT,  
Specially Andrew Usher's Scotch Whisky, 48/- per doz., 10 years old.  
Proprietor—WILLIAM HOWLAND.





2 From 1785 the pub was run by Robert Giles and then for most of the 19th century by three generations of the Davis family. In the 1871 census the Bear Inn is described as a brewery and farm of 15 acres employing 10 servants.

3 Prior to the building of the houses in Poets' Corner (Shakespeare, Milton etc avenues) from 1899, the area south of pub up to the Frome road was farmland and had few houses (only nearby at Elm Place and at and near Devonshire Buildings).

4 The Bath & West Show – originally organised by the *Bath and West of England Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture, Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, founded in 1777 – used to take place on the area now occupied by Poets' Corner and Alexandra Park. It later took place at different sites before the permanent 100 hectare ground was established near Shepton Mallet. The collapse of the original wooden Halfpenny Bridge in Widcombe on 16 Jun 1877 arose because an excursion train from Weymouth bringing visitors to the centennial Bath & West Show caused too many people to be on the structure. About 10 lives were lost and many were injured. A press report of the time described the bridge as “more elegant than substantial”.

5 The building was destroyed in the 1942 bombing of Bath. It was rebuilt in its current form, without the brewery, and had a separate lounge/restaurant and bar. A refurbishment in the 1990s removed the division between the two areas.

6 *Bath Pubs* by Kirsten Elliott & Andrew Swift, Akeman Press, 2003 contains a detailed history of the pub on pages 33-39 including a late 19th century map showing its location.

7 *Awash with Ale - 2000 years of imbibing in Bath* by Andrew Swift & Kirsten Elliott, Akeman Press 2004 has four references to the Bear, Wellsway, including: boxing matches and deferment of the renewal of the license in 1916 because a conviction had been recorded in the previous year.

8 From *Bath* by John Haddon (B T Batsford, London, 1973) p 41:  
 “Interpretation of place names is fraught with difficulties and obvious explanations are not always correct. An example in Bath is Bear Flat. The meaning seems obvious and there is a Bear Hotel with an effigy of the appropriate animal, but if we look at early documents we find that the name was once *Berewick*. *Bere* in Old English means barley (hence ‘beer’) and *wick* has a number of associated meanings, one of which is ‘farm’. Bear Flat was therefore originally ‘barley farm’: that the wick got lost, the *bere* became bear, and ‘flat’ was tacked on a describing the physical nature of the place.”



Bear Flat after the bombing of April 1942 – Image courtesy of *Bath in Time* - Bath Central Library

Produced by P J Bendall, Jan 2011